

# High stakes, low drama and no budget deal in Olympia

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If you walk around the Capitol today you won't get the sense there's a crisis looming in the state.

A government shutdown is a mere three weeks away but on another sunny and warm day, there's not much visible activity taking place to prevent the shuttering of agencies.

What's needed is a new two-year state budget. And as a small number of House and Senate members try to hash one out, the majority of lawmakers as well as lobbyists, reporters and other interested parties are left to swap rumors about the progress of those efforts.

It's clear House Democrats are insisting on additional revenue and Senate Republicans are resisting. What's not clear is exactly how close the two sides got to at least agreeing on how much money to spend – before deciding where that money would come from.

What is known is Gov. Jay Inslee stepped in last week to help guide House and Senate negotiators toward an agreement.

Democratic and Republican envoys from each caucus [came to his office every morning](#), to try to construct a bridge across the rhetorical and financial chasm between the majority parties in the two chambers.

This was a big moment for Inslee. He's garnered a reputation around the Capitol as being averse to such deep engagement in the legislative process – unless the subject matter is climate change. Yet there he was at the table every day slogging it out with the crowd of lawmakers and staff.

On Friday, Inslee and his budget director David Schumacher met privately with Rep. Ross Hunter and Sen. Andy Hill, the lead budget writers of the two chambers. That conversation ended with a greater sense of optimism at the proximity of an accord than at any other point in awhile – at least from the perspective of the governor.

[Schumacher told reporters](#) they were pretty close to an agreement on the level of spending AKA the size of the box.

At one point he described it as a "tentative agreement" if both caucuses go along with the framework put together by negotiators.

Apparently that characterization deflated the buoyant mood and kind of ended Inslee's tenure as a potential deal-maker.

Schumacher, in the view of lawmakers, committed a major foul by telling reporters about what purportedly transpired behind those closed doors. For all their disagreements, Democrats and Republicans agree there must be a cone of silence on those conversations. That's why the door is closed.

Lawmakers, who may be short on publicly palatable reasons for their failure to pass a budget, had a fall guy for their latest apparent breakdown.

An alternative tale circulating in the rumor mill is the tentative bridge collapsed under the weight of opposition from conservative Republican senators – and not anything Schumacher said.

Regardless, there have been no face-to-face meetings involving the governor and budget negotiators from the House and Senate since last week. While Inslee has spoken with representatives of each chamber at different times, they've not been together.

Budget offers are continuing to get exchanged between the two chambers. If an accord is reached on how much will be spent in the next two-year budget, the other pieces are supposed to fall into place quickly, budget writers have insisted.

That's where things appear to stand as the threat of a shutdown grows nearer every hour.